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COUNCIL

UPDATE

ONTARIO ADVISORY COUNCIL ON WOMEN'S ISSUES

SUMMER 1987



Early this year, Council set out to discover what issues concern sole support mothers, a group representing more than 9% of Ontario's population. Almost half have annual incomes below \$10,000. This is staggering in light of the \$19,554 annual income cited by Statistics Canada as bare minimum for a family of three. Sole support mothers are faced with raising children alone, dealing with unfair stigmas, a society that looks down on them and persons in authority they see as intimidating.

On January 22, Hamilton was the first stop in Council's fact-finding tour of five Ontario municipalities. After Hamilton came Windsor, February 11; Kitchener-Waterloo, February 26; Peterborough, March 26,

Single Mothers Speak Out

Thunder Bay, April 23 and Toronto, June 19 and 20.

Called Sole Support M.O.M.: Mothers On The Move, the objective of these public consultations was to learn about regional concerns facing sole support mothers and to hear about these issues first-hand. Three or four Council members, led by chairperson **Dorothy Kirby**, travelled to each of these regions, and heard presentations from local groups and individuals. For all consultations, no pre-registration was necessary, the public was invited, admission and childcare was free and sandwiches and coffee were provided.

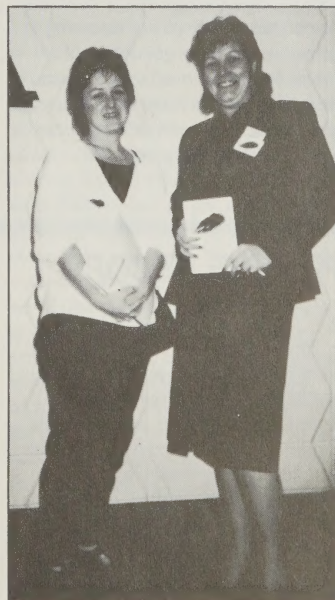
In Peterborough, a mother admitted the free buffet provided was one genuine incentive to attend the meeting. Another with three children added: "We always buy reduced produce, never fresh fruits and vegetables."

A special highlight of each regional consultation was a draw to attend the two-day Toronto conference

with travel, accommodation and food expenses paid by Council.

Two basic concerns emerged in all regions: Lack of affordable housing and inadequate and inaccessible child-care. Sole support mothers are hit hard throughout Ontario by landlords hesitant to rent to people with children and

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Above, Council member Dorothy Kirby chats with Hamilton sole support mother Tricia Bird whose name was drawn to attend the Toronto conference.



Left, Dorothy Kirby with author Paula Caplan, a keynote speaker on the second day of the Toronto Conference.

SINGLE MOTHERS

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there is a long waiting list for public housing in every region visited by Council members. As for childcare, it was reported that even when a single mother is lucky enough to find childcare, she may discover her work schedule and the childcare centre hours do not coincide. Sole support mothers pointed out, eloquently and passionately, how these problems are further complicated by the low incomes of working sole support mothers and inadequate social assistance cheques. Statistics show single fathers earn on an average of \$10,000 more annually than their female counterparts.

In Toronto, a two-day wrap-up conference was held with the objective of formulating recommendations to improve the lives of sole support mothers.

Some 200 people attended each day, 95% of them sole support mothers. During a panel discussion on the first day, a sole support mother previously on social assistance benefits, shared her experience of returning to school and finding gainful employment. Another moved the audience with her emotional story of fleeing an abusive situation and running to a shelter with her 18-month-old

daughter. She had no other choice but to go on social assistance. **Honourable Ian Scott** advised the audience, to form lobby groups and demand change. **Dorothy O'Connell**, an Ottawa author and advocate worker, delivered a humorous and biting speech about what it's like to be poor and a sole support mother. (See box). The next day, **Paula Caplan**, author of *The Myth of Women's Masochism*, a book refuting the notion of women enjoying painful relationships, approached the issues from a different perspective.

Mainly, however, the two-day conference consisted of workshops on topics such as housing, health, child-

care, transition houses, employment and retraining to name only a few. Dozens of recommendations were hammered out during each one.

This fall, Council will report its findings to the Minister Responsible for Women's Issues and conference recommendations will be forwarded to the appropriate government ministers and to the agencies responsible for implementing programs. In addition, Council will meet with ministers and officials to lobby for change. As Council President Sam Ion told the Toronto media, "We never get everything we want, but any change is a good sign. We'll just have to keep pushing."

Keynote speaker **Dorothy O'Connell** highlighted the second day of the Toronto Sole Support Mothers conference with lines like these:

"I always find it a bit of a challenge to speak about the lighter side of poverty. What is the lighter side? I asked some co-workers.

They said: "Well, my purse is lighter, my kids are lighter..."

"One Toronto newspaper wrote that public housing was dangerous filled with so many women. They might find out they don't need men and that would be bad for the

children..."

"You must have heard the statement: You can't solve a problem by throwing money at it. Funny, I always thought poverty, by definition, was a lack of money. And that, therefore, throwing money at it would be a good idea..."

These are just a few of the gems contained in Dorothy's speech, copies of which are available by calling or writing to the Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues, 880 Bay Street, 5th Floor, Toronto, Ontario, M7A 1N3, 416-965-5824 (collect)

FOR THE RECORD

If you think you've been missing some issues of *Update*, don't worry, you haven't! This is the first issue since September 1986, and it reflects some of Council's activities over the past year. It's obvious where the energy has been directed, and unfortunately, publishing *Update* fell by the wayside. But we're committed to keeping you informed, and we hope to publish 3 or 4 times a year.

Currently, Council is working in several areas. The **Sole Support Mothers committee** is studying the hundreds of recommendations and suggestions resulting from the regional consultations and June conference. Later this fall, these will be forwarded to the appropriate minis-

tries and agencies with availability to the public. A **Women and Health Booklet** has been written and is just entering the production stage. It will be available to the public, free, at the end of October. Council is developing a paper on **New Reproductive Technologies**, focussing on artificial reproduction and prenatal diagnostic techniques. A two-day **Motherhood conference** is tentatively planned for May 6 and 7, 1988 in Toronto. This is at the very early planning stages, and details will be available at a later date.

In October, Council's **13th Annual Report** will be available highlighting Council's activities and initiatives from April 1, 1986 to March 31, 1987.

Ontario Election

September 10 has been declared election day in Ontario. To help you make an informed choice, Council has prepared a woman's guide to the 1987 Ontario election. Called *Raising The Issues*, this pamphlet offers eight easy steps to organizing an all-candidates' meeting and provides questions to ask on issues such as battered women, free trade, addiction services, occupational health, to name only a few. 10,000 have been printed and are available to all women and women's groups. Use it to find out where your candidate stands on issues of concern to women. Write or phone Council to obtain your copy.

An Equal Society: Into the Year 2000!

An Equal Society: Into the Year 2000! was an exciting and thought-provoking public symposium presented by Council with the Provincial, Federal and Territorial Status of Women Councils last November 3 and 4. Women's future roles in Canadian society during the next century was the focus and a dynamic slate of speakers examined how women could shape future society. Economic issues were explored the first day while social issues were featured the next day.

Economist **Marjorie Cohen** opened the two-day event by warning the 300 plus audience that free trade is dangerous to women because it could cost many their jobs, particularly in the service and manufacturing industries. Other featured speakers were Professor **Pat McDermott** who spoke about the impact new technology will continue to have on women and **Akua Benjamin** from the Congress of Black Women who gave an address on employment. The day ended with a discussion on families by *Toronto Star* columnist, **Lois Sweet**.

A special highlight of the day was the luncheon address by Canada's ambassador to the United Nations, **Stephen Lewis**, who advised that Canada is taking a leading role in pushing women's rights in "the last unfettered bastion of unfettered male privilege". His reference to senior UN administrators as "pompous dinosaurs" and "pre-paleolithic neanderthals" amused and delighted the

crowd. He also cited the struggle for women's equality as one of the great historical forces during the last quarter of the 20th century and stated he has been committed to feminism all his adult life.

Dr. Stuart Smith, Chairman of the Science Council of Canada com-



Dr. Margrit Eichler, Council member Ceta Ramkhalawansingh, left and Canadian Advisory Council President Sylvia Gold, right, share a joke with the crowd.

menced the next day's examination of social issues. His tantalizing glimpse into the future revealed the expansion of the service sector, especially in the area of personal services. "Machines will do everything that human beings cannot do better, except in the realm of human contact, which machines cannot duplicate," he told the audience.

Judy Erola, former MP, talked enthusiastically about the majestic drive of women to include the equality clause in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which "proves what can be done when women decide it must be done," she said. But for Parliament to truly reflect the make-up of society,

"women within the existing political parties must challenge today's team leaders and women must not only join the parties, they must make the reformation happen," she stated.

Dr. Margrit Eichler, sociologist and past president of the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, talked about equality in the year 2000 pointing out quotas

could help in the short term, but would do nothing to combat poverty in general. "Playing with numbers does not reduce inequality, but moves it around so there will eventually be as many 'bag men as bag ladies'" she said.

Dr. Ursula Franklin concluded the event with a presentation on the necessity of peace for an equal society, stating "peace is a commitment to the future. There is no future without peace. Peace is not so much the absence of war as it is the absence of fear and fear means being afraid of things one has no power to change." The proceedings of this symposium have now been published and are available by calling or writing Council's office.

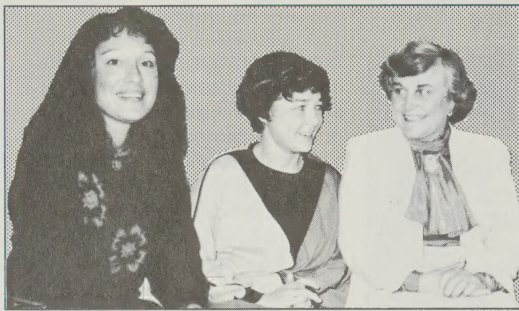


Honourable Ian Scott (left) chats to Council President Sam Ion and Stephen Lewis during the symposium luncheon.

True story:

Judy Erola told the audience this "honourable" story during the Year 2000 symposium: Upon presenting her credentials at the bank, the clerk informed her she could not accept Ms. Erola's documents. "Why?", asked Ms. Erola. Replied the clerk: "One says Judith Erola, and the other says Honourable J. Erola. You have two different first names." And that's why, for a while anyway, Ms. Erola's family called her Honey, short for Honourable!

Hello and...



Newest Council members Bernice Dubec-Heald, Danielle Coulombe and Dianne Harkin meet each other for the first time at last September's Council meeting.

In September, three new members were appointed to Council for three-year terms:

Bernice Dubec-Heald sits on Council's Sole Support Mothers Committee and is particularly interested in issues involving employment, native women and trades and training. She is the executive director of Wequedong Lodge in Thunder Bay, a nine-bed facility providing short term accommodation and support services to out-of-town native people seeking health care in Thunder Bay. She lives with her husband and two children in Thunder Bay and has been an active volunteer in this area. **Danielle Coulombe** is the director of studies at College Universitaire in Hearst, which is affiliated with Laurentian University. She also teaches history at this facility

and is an active volunteer in Hearst's historical society. She is involved with several local women's groups and her special interests are education and francophone women. Much to her delight, she is expecting a baby at the end of September.

Dianne Harkin has been a

farmer for 16 years in the Winchester area and is a columnist for two magazines geared to farming women. She is the founder of Women for the Survival of Agriculture and organized the first conference of farming women in Canada. She sits on the board of Naomi Family Resource Centre, a shelter for abused women in Winches-

ter and was a member of the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women for four years. She has two grown children and two grandchildren. Her special interests are family violence and rural women. **Anne Rochon Ford**, appointed last November, is the policy and program advisor on women's health issues at Women's College Hospital in Toronto. Co-founder of DES Action/Toronto and the Toronto Women's Health network, she is still an active volunteer in these organizations. Besides authoring a book on the history of women at U of T, she also writes articles in the



Council member Anne Rochon Ford

women's health field. Bilingual, she sits on Council's Francophone and Sole Support Mother's committees. Her special interests are women's health and women and aging.

...Goodbye

Barb Stone, St. Catharines and **Annabelle Logan**, London both served Council for six years. Their terms expired in June when they were presented with plaques of appreciation by Hon. Ian Scott, Minister Responsible for Women's Issues. **Annabelle**, a retired nurse, had been Council's Health Committee chair and continues her history of active volunteerism by

working with a new sole support mothers advocacy group in London. While a member, **Barb** tirelessly brought the concerns of the Niagara region to the attention of Council. She continues in her job as constituency assistant to the MPP from Brock riding. We wish them well in all their future activities and are mindful of their ever watchful eye on ours.

Barb Stone, left, and Annabelle Logan (right) receive plaques of appreciation from Hon. Ian Scott for their six years of service as Council members.



CALLING YOUNG WRITERS

Youth Voice is an informal newsletter published by Council for Ontario's young women. Issues No. 1, written by Pauline Peng, a 17 year-old grade 12 Toronto student, was published last September. Pauline gave us an update on women's issues at her school and wrote about women and war. We'd like to include Issue No. 2 of *Youth Voice* in the next *Update* and we're looking for a young woman to write her views on women's issues affecting female students. It doesn't matter what part of Ontario you're from, we'd like to hear from you. Everybody has an opinion - here's your chance to write yours. Call Lydia at 416-965-5824 (collect) or write to the Council office.

Members: News and Views

Continuing our series of getting to know Council members, Bernice Dubec-Heald presents her own opinions from a northern woman's perspective.

by Bernice Dubec-Heald

Greetings from Thunder Bay, the largest urban centre in the northwestern Ontario region. I hope everyone had as great a summer as we had here. You really appreciate swimming in Lake Superior water during hot, sunny weather.

Thunder Bay boasts the largest grain port in the world and features the legendary sleeping giant in the harbour. It is the focal point for services in health care, social services, education, employment and recreation. It is no wonder the city is considered the hub of the northwestern region!

Women here are equally as concerned as the rest of Ontario women about adequate and affordable housing, quality education, full-time employment, the childcare crisis and the elimination of inequitable differences.

But a fundamental concern of northern women is financial security. With only limited and seasonal employment opportunities, this region



has high unemployment, dependence on social assistance programs and a lack of basic community services.

I personally believe all women need an adequate income base, whether they are homemakers, working, training, studying or of retirement age. If I had a wish, it would be for a guaranteed annual income program to replace or supplement existing social relief programs. In my opinion, such an initiative would provide the necessary financial assistance for women choosing to stay home to care for their children. I believe the key element to the program would be the establishment of an annual income level higher than the national poverty level with built-in flexibility for training, educa-

tion and part-time employment. The long term objective would be to facilitate economic independence and to provide an adequate income base.

Another personal interest is the plight of Aboriginal women. Whether they live in isolated communities, small towns or urban centres, their future looks increasingly bleak. The chronic poverty is overwhelming, the high incidence of family violence, severe alcohol abuse and the deterioration of traditional lifestyles has had a devastating effect on Aboriginal women. Even today, a majority of native households still do not have running water or indoor plumbing, and half the available housing is in need of repair.

Without doubt, the most important concern facing Aboriginal people is the freedom to exercise their sovereignty as a nation. The historical tragedies, colonization and government control of finances and community economy has fostered a sense of hopelessness among native peoples.

It is my personal goal, as a member of the Ontario Advisory Council on Women's Issues, to sensitize, educate and seek the support of the public and government officials in resolving the concerns of Aboriginal people. In closing, I share with you some lines from *The Woman's Part*, a poetic and poignant statement given to me by an elder a few years ago: "*In the Ojibway tradition, it was known and understood that the woman was the 'centre of everything.' The children represented the future, but the women were the present and the future, because without them, there could be no future for the nations, the cycles of life would have no continuity; the Creator's plan for human beings would end. The woman is the foundation on which nations are built. The woman is the centre of everything. And it is that search that women must begin and we must help them to get it back together. That is the absolute first step. The answers are in the spiritual, because it is a spiritual question.*"

Award for Dedication

Council member **Dianne Harkin** was one of 20 people chosen by the provincial government from more than 400 nominees to receive the new Order of Ontario. The Order, established in last year's Throne Speech, was created as Ontario's highest commendation of recognition in any area benefiting society, i.e. volunteerism, research, industry, etc. Dianne was awarded for her dedicated work in raising the social and economic status of farm women. All recipients were invested at a special ceremony in the Ontario Legislative Chamber May 6, 1987. Congratulations Dianne!



Wearing her Order of Ontario insignia, Council member Dianne Harkin stands with Lieutenant Governor Lincoln Alexander after the awards ceremony last May.

Bernice Dubec-Heald

The Council is an advisory body to the Ontario Government on all matters pertaining to women.

Established at arms length from the Government, it is in the unique position of being the *ONLY* official advisory body on women's issues. This means that the Government has made a commitment to listen to Council's views and recommendations, and this special relationship allows Government's direction and policies to be effectively challenged.

There are 16 members, including a President, all of whom are appointed by Cabinet on a part-time basis for three-year terms. Members come from around the province, and for the most part, do not represent organizations or groups.

The Council attempts to bring a balance of women's views from across the province to the attention of the Government. Its unique relationship with the Government provides a direct channel to the ears of the decision makers of Ontario.

COUNCIL MEMBERS

Sam Ion, *President*, Toronto
Sandra Kerr, *Vice President*, Oakville
Ed Arundell, Toronto
Sarah Band, Toronto
Danielle Coulombe, Hearst
Bernice Dubec-Heald, Thunder Bay
Dianne Harkin, Winchester
Dorothy Kirby, Etobicoke
Sandra Manzig, Windsor
Susan McDonald, Arva
Ceta Ramkhalawansingh, Toronto
Anne Rochon Ford, Toronto

SPEAKERS: Members of Council are available for speaking engagements. Please write to Council with details of your meeting.

COUNCIL STAFF

Bridget Vianna, *Executive Officer*
Lydia Oleksyn, *Public Relations Officer*
Elayne Celfets Osher, *Researcher/Conference Co-ordinator*
Nancy Webb, *Secretary*
Daphne Hay, *Receptionist*

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AN OPEN LETTER TO THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT FROM THE DISABLED WOMEN'S NETWORK, D.A.W.N. TORONTO

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D.A.W.N.

122 Galt Ave., Toronto, Ont. M4M 2Z3

Who would think of putting out a flyer saying: IMPORTANT FEMINIST EVENT FEATURING MS. DARING DAISY, WELL KNOWN AUTHOR. November 30, Everywoman's Hall. Admission Free. Childcare. DISABLED WOMEN NEED NOT COME.

Yet often, that's what publicity for feminist events says to disabled women. Your problem is usually that you just plain don't know what accessibility is. Our problem is that we can't even get in to tell you.

Accessibility means different things to different people. And remember disabled women are 18 per cent of all women.

For a woman who uses a wheelchair, accessibility means no steps (a good ramp/or level entrance), an adapted washroom (with grab bars, a sink that her chair will fit under, room to get the chair in the cubicle and make a transfer sideways from the chair onto the toilet), and a place to sit, preferably with her friends.

For deaf and hearing impaired women, access means sign language interpreters. It means an office with a Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) or a meeting with a loop amplification device. These things are not as expensive or hard to get as you think.

For blind and visually impaired women, accessibility means having printed matter (books, brochures, agendas, etc.) on cassette tape, in large print, or, sometimes in Braille. It means that her Seeing Eye Dog is welcome and that you don't pet or feed that dog without the owner's permission. It means you offer to guide a blind woman to her seat.

For developmentally disabled women, your attitude and language are the key to accessibility. A cliché watch is, "Confined to a wheelchair". We use our wheelchairs (and crutches, canes, walkers, etc.)

For those whose disability you

can't see, access is often a matter of attitude and flexibility. For a woman with epilepsy, it means no strobe lights or flash bulbs. For a woman with diabetes, it means nutrition breaks.

For women with environmental illnesses, access means Smoke Free meetings and events.

For some women, accessibility means an attendant to help with basic needs. You will need to supply trained attendants or she may want to bring her own who should be admitted free of charge. An attendant is a technical aide in the same way as a wheelchair.

Even when events are accessible, disabled women may not come, often because of transportation. Wheeltrans, Toronto's alternative transit system, certainly is not equal to regular TTC. Wheeltrans users, for example, are not allowed to use Metropasses, must pay a full fare each time, and book at least 7 days in advance. And that's no guarantee you'll get there. Incidentally, if there's a goddess out there, DAWN needs its own wheelchair van.

Finally, accessibility means publicity in the newspapers or on the phone lines of the disabled movement, containing information about whether or not the event is accessible to disabled women. If it is, these symbols should be used:



Be specific. For example, "Hall wheelchair accessible. Bathroom not accessible." And consult with DAWN. We know what's accessible and may even know about funding.

At this point, perhaps you are saying, "It's too expensive."

BEING DISABLED HAS NEVER BEEN COST EFFECTIVE AND IT NEVER WILL BE.

We must never, never, never shut out any women. All women are equal. All belong in the women's movement.

Remember us because, **WE ARE YOUR SISTERS.**

NOTE: All Council's activities are wheelchair and hearing impaired accessible, and are smoke free.

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